MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (SHRI YOGINDER K. ALAGH): (a) and (b) Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) at Thiruvananthapuram is the lead Centre for launch vehicle technology development. Currently, the ongoing programmes in VSSC consist of production of Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), development of Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) and advanced R&D needed for future.

Suitable augmentation/modernisation of various facilities and restructuring of various activities needed for these programmes are done on a continuous basis. Necessary funds are being provided as and when required.

Biddings for exploration of oil and natural gas

1908. DR. B. B. DUTTA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) the number of bidding invited by Government for exploration of oil and natural gas so far;

(b) the number of blocks awarded on the basis of these biddings; and

(c) the number, out of these, which have been located in the North-Eastern region?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) Since 1980, Government of India has invited offers for exploration of oil and gas under 8 exploration bidding rounds and one joint venture exploration programme.

(b) Government of India has awarded a total of 26 blocks so far under these offers.

(c) No contract has been awarded so far for any block located in North-Eastern region.

Divesting the Discretionary Powers of Ministers

1909. SHRI SHIV CHARAN SINGH: SHRI GOVINDRAM MIRI:

Will the Minister of PLANNING AND PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have recently divested the Ministers of his Council of discretionary powers;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) whether any exception has been made in case of Minister for Communications?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION (SHRI YOGINDER K. ALAGH): (a) to (c) Government have decided to abolish all discretionary quotas hitherto enjoyed by the Ministers in all the Ministries/Departments. It has also been decided that in areas where it is considered absolutely necessary to make a small number of out-of-turn allotments, Ministries/Departments should formulate clear rules and guidelines and make arrangements for making the out-of-turn allotments by a Committee specially set up for this purpose. The necessary directives have been issued in this matter on 18.7.1996.

गावों को बारहमासी सड़कों से जोड़ा जाना

1910. **श्री राम जेठमलानी:** क्या ग्रामीण क्षेत्र और रोजगार मंत्री यह बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि:

(क) क्या यह सच है कि देश में 1000 से अधिक की आबादी वाले गांव अभी तक भी समीपतम बारहमासी सड़कों से जुड़े हुए नहीं हैं;

(ख) मार्च 1996 के अन्त तक समीपतम बारहमासी सड़कों के साथ जुड़े 1000 लोगों की आबादी वाले गांवों की प्रतिशतता क्या थी;

(ग) क्या सरकार ने विशेष गांवों को समीपतम बारहमासी सड़कों से जोड़ने के लिये कोई समयबद्ध योजना तैयार की है;